



## **A Hidden Architectural Gem in Madhya Pradesh's Sole Hill Station**

**The Christ Church at Pachmarhi**

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### **ABSTRACT-**

The Malwa and Bundelkhand regions are encompassed by a limited array of heritage sites from the colonial era. These sites often manifest as abandoned railway bungalows or structures within cantonment areas, where their historical imprints endure. The primary cultural legacy resides in the form of churches, their architectural edifices, and accompanying burial grounds.

Pachmarhi, the sole hill station in Madhya Pradesh, boasts a significant number of British bungalows that serve as poignant remnants of the colonial era. Additionally, it is home to two notable Indo-Gothic church buildings, contributing to its rich architectural heritage.

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**Keywords- Cantonment, Sanitarium, Chaplain, Bishop, Gothic, Vaulting**



The Christ Church<sup>1</sup> is situated in the Hoshangabad<sup>2</sup> district of Madhya Pradesh on the foothills of the Mahadeo<sup>3</sup> Hills of central India. The credit for discovering Pachmarhi as a sanitarium is commonly given to Captain J. Forsyth<sup>4</sup>, author of "*The Highlands of Central India*"<sup>5</sup>. He was dispatched in 1862 by Sir Richard Temple<sup>6</sup>, the Chief Commissioner at the time, with instructions to explore the Satpura forests region.

Pachmarhi, a hill station in the Central Provinces<sup>7</sup>, is located on an isolated plateau within the Mahadeo Hills of the Satpura range<sup>8</sup>, situated in the southeastern region of the Hoshangabad district. It is approximately 21 miles directly south of Piparia station on the Itarsi-Jubbulpore<sup>9</sup> section of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway<sup>10</sup>. Pachmarhi sits atop the Satpura range, positioned south of the Narmada River. This hill station is renowned for its verdant landscapes, tranquil ambiance, and stunning waterfalls, rendering it a favored destination among tourists. Pachmarhi serves as the official residence of the local government of the Central Provinces for three months spanning from April to June, as well as for six weeks during September and October. Additionally, it functions as a sanitarium for troops in the Central Provinces area.



Pachmarhi<sup>11</sup> Cantonment is home to numerous British bungalows and other colonial-era buildings. In 1869, a decision was made to establish a local sanitarium, leading to the acquisition of 662<sup>12</sup> acres of land for this purpose. Subsequently, in 1870<sup>13</sup>, plans were considered for the establishment of a military station, and as an initial trial, 200 men from Saugor<sup>14</sup> and Kamptee were stationed in Pachmarhi.

The following year saw the acquisition of approximately 15,000 acres, encompassing the entire plateau and some adjacent valleys. The administration is divided between the Cantonment Committee and the Municipal Committee, with the management of the vast forest area on the plateau overseen by a joint committee comprising representatives from both bodies. Within the Cantonment limits are facilities such as rifle ranges, offices, barracks, messes for the Small Arms School, soldiers' family quarters for the sanitarium, Military Station Hospital, staff residences, and privately-owned bungalows.

Additionally, it encompasses the Sadar Bazaar, the sole market area in Pachmarhi. The executive authority of the Cantonment is held by the Cantonment Executive Officer.

Both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church<sup>15</sup> have their places of worship in Pachmarhi, with the Roman Catholic Church being finished in 1923<sup>16</sup>. Pachmarhi has a permanent Roman Catholic Chaplain, while a Church of England<sup>17</sup> Chaplain is typically assigned to the station during the hot weather season. Additionally, the Bishop of Nagpur typically resides in Pachmarhi from April to June.

The Protestant Christ Church was built by the friends of Eastern Bengal Infantry General Frank wood Morus<sup>18</sup> in his memory after he died in 1878<sup>19</sup> and was completed in the year 1882<sup>20</sup>. On November 4th, 1882, Bishop Edward Johnson<sup>21</sup>, the Bishop of Calcutta, presided over the consecration ceremony of Christ Church in Pachmarhi. This church building is made up of plastered and unplastered stone. Like any other church building this also possesses a cross structure in shape. The Sanctuary is apsidal and vaulted.

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## The Church Building



The Christ Church building features a grand designer door and numerous Belgium glass windows. Initially, it comprised a channel and nave, along with a stone-raised pulpit and apse. Additionally, the building offers extra seating areas on both sides of the apse near the main altar to accommodate more worshippers.

The exterior of the church building is constructed with rough local stone, while the interior is adorned with stone facing. Notably, the sanctuary and chancel feature marble pillars, which replaced the original stone ones in 1893.

The construction of the church building initially amounted to 12,631<sup>22</sup> rupees. Of this total, the government contributed 7,100 rupees, while the remainder was sourced through subscriptions and grants from church societies. Notably, the Calcutta Church Building Fund<sup>23</sup> contributed 1,990 rupees towards the project.

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## Belgium glass window panel



This floral glass window panel is situated above the entrance of the church building. In Gothic architecture, stained glass windows served not only as decorative elements but also as a means of conveying religious narratives to an often-illiterate congregation. The round shape of the window panel might represent a rose window, a common feature in Gothic architecture.

Typically situated in the upper levels of the building, a round stained-glass window panel in a Gothic church is commonly found in the transept or the apse.

A round stained-glass window panel in a Gothic church building is an exquisite example of craftsmanship and artistry, enhancing the space with its awe-inspiring beauty and fostering a spiritual atmosphere.

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### The Pulpit



The pulpit of the church building stands out as a distinctive feature, crafted from plastered stone. Plastered stone offers a traditional yet elegant appearance, adding to the architectural beauty and character of the church interior.

The pulpit is situated on a raised platform, accessible via five steps, underscoring its significance within the church. This elevated position directs focus towards the speaker or clergy addressing the congregation, symbolizing their authority and spiritual leadership. The platform serves as a symbolic stage for imparting teachings or messages, emphasizing the sacredness of the space and the importance of the words being delivered. The facade of the pulpit is adorned with large floral stone engravings, enhancing its visual appeal and adding a touch of intricate detail to the structure.

Additionally, the height of the pulpit stands at 1.77 meters, further emphasizing its presence and importance within the space.

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### Altar Roof



The most remarkable feature of the Christ Church building is undoubtedly the altar roof, which is supported by eight semi-circular carved pillars. These finely crafted pillars add an exquisite touch to the architectural design of the church, enhancing its beauty and allure. Their intricate carving not only provides structural support but also adds to the aesthetic appeal of the altar area, making it a focal point within the church's interior. This combination of craftsmanship and design creates a captivating atmosphere that adds to the overall grandeur of the Christ Church in Pachmarhi. What adds to the beauty of the altar roof is the pair of ten Belgian glass windows, each featuring intricate designs and scenes from the Bible. altar roof is a pair of ten Belgian glass windows, each featuring intricate designs and scenes from the Bible.

Furthermore, the unique aspect of these windows is that each of the ten windows is donated by different individuals or groups.

Indeed, the beauty and significance of the Christ Church's altar area are enriched by the generosity of various donors. For example, Mr. Crosthwaite, Mr. Fraser, Mr. Phillips, Colonel Hilton, Colonel Mayne, and many others have each donated a window to adorn the church with Belgian glass.

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